

THE  
THREE PRIZE ESSAYS  
ON  
AGRICULTURE  
AND  
THE CORN LAW.

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PUBLISHED BY THE  
NATIONAL ANTI-CORN-LAW LEAGUE.

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"A system from which the agricultural labourer is suffering more than any other part of the community."—*Earl Fitzwilliam's Address to the Landowners.*

"The painful confession must be made, that our own benefit is the true object for which this obnoxious code is established."—*Ibid.*

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*Price Fourpence the Three.*



THE COUNCIL  
OF THE  
NATIONAL ANTI-CORN-LAW LEAGUE  
TO THE  
FARMERS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM.

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FELLOW COUNTRYMEN,

We entreat you to read dispassionately and calmly the following pages, which are devoted exclusively to the consideration of your interests and the interests of your dependants.

Although we have been constantly told that the Corn Law is maintained for your benefit, the history of British agriculture, for the last twenty-five years, affords too much reason to believe that it has brought much suffering and loss upon both farmers and farm labourers. We ask you whether, since the passing of the famous Corn Law of 1815, with all your industry, intelligence, and frugality, you have found farming to be a thriving business? On the contrary, how many moderate capitals have since that time been swept away for rent—how many small holdings have been swallowed up by rich speculators, who now occupy vast breadths of land which formerly supported several homesteads? Cast your eyes around your various districts, tax the memories of your older neighbours, and reckon the number of tenants that have been ruined and sold up for rent since the Corn Law of 1815!

If the business of farming has not been prosperous during the last quarter of a century, we submit to you that the time is come when you ought to inquire whether the whole system of PROTECTION has not been contrived solely for the short-sighted gain of the landlords. This question is fully discussed by the authors of the following pages; and the writer of one of the Essays being a farmer, and therefore identified in interest with yourselves, you will, doubtless, give to his opinions all the attention due to a practical agriculturist. Again commending these pages to your candid consideration,

We are, fellow-countrymen, your well-wishers,  
(On behalf of the Council of the League,)

GEORGE WILSON, Chairman.



AGRICULTURE  
AND  
THE CORN LAW.

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PRIZE ESSAY.

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SHOWING THE  
INJURIOUS EFFECTS OF THE CORN LAW  
UPON  
TENANT FARMERS AND FARM LABOURERS.

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BY GEORGE HOPE,  
TENANT FARMER.

MANCHESTER:  
J. GADSBY, NEWALL'S-BUILDINGS, MARKET-STREET.  
1842.

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## PRIZE ESSAYS.

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### AGRICULTURE AND THE CORN LAWS.

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The Council of the National Anti-Corn-Law League hereby offer the following PRIZES for the BEST PRACTICAL ESSAYS, each not to exceed sixteen pages octavo, demonstrating the Injurious Effects of the Corn Laws on Tenant Farmers and Farm Labourers, and the Advantages which those classes would derive from its Total and Immediate Repeal:—

Best Prize - - - - -	20 Guineas.
Second ditto - - - - -	10 "
Third ditto - - - - -	5 "

The Council will publish the three best Essays, with or without the authors' names, as may be most agreeable to them. The Essays to be sent in not later than the 1st of November, addressed to George Wilson, Esq., Anti-Corn-Law League, Manchester.

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THE COUNCIL HAVE AWARDED THE HIGHEST PRIZE TO EACH OF THE THREE  
ACCOMPANYING ESSAYS.

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MANCHESTER:

PRINTED BY J. GADSBY, NEWALL'S-BUILDINGS, MARKET-STREET.

## AN ADDRESS ON THE CORN LAWS.

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I have no intention to enter at any length into the question of Free Trade, except so far as it affects the tenant farmers and farm labourers of the kingdom. Free Trade has indeed been long recommended by those who have made political economy a study; and the last session of parliament, by the amended tariff and slightly modified corn bill, did homage to this principle; not so much by the extent of the alterations actually made, though they all pointed in one direction, as by the enunciation of the reasons and principles with which the head of a Conservative government advocated those changes. Arguments of a peculiar kind were used regarding the corn monopoly. High prices for grain were deprecated as an evil, but still it was urged that anything approaching to a free trade in corn would ruin the farmer, throw the land out of cultivation, starve the agricultural labourer, and finally ruin all classes. Now, what I wish to show, as a farmer, is simply this, that however necessary a corn bill may be to enable landlords to obtain high money rents, it is not at all requisite for the existence and well being of the tenant farmer, and still less for the agricultural labourer, but, on the contrary, that it is a positive evil to both.

I undertake to prove that it signifies but little to tenant farmers and agricultural labourers what the nominal price of their produce is, in comparison to steady markets and good customers; that the best, the only honest and true plan of fostering agriculture has yet to be tried, and that that method is, *cherishing the growth and securing the welfare of the largest possible number of consumers*. The landlords, who have hitherto governed this country, blinded by their own apparent interest, mistaking immediate profit to themselves as the best means of promoting the general well-being, have never hesitated to prevent the consumers buying their food at the cheapest market. If this odious monopoly of the first necessary of life must still be kept up, let it be distinctly understood by the country at large that it is solely for the benefit of the landlords. "Let," I say, "the saddle be put upon the right horse," for the tenants and labourers neither have, nor can they have any permanent interest in a system which directly lowers profits and wages, a system

which restricts the energies of the people to the supply merely of the home market, necessarily of a limited character; or compels them to leave the home of their fathers and their affections, to seek a livelihood in distant colonies, and endure all the rigours and hardships of a first settlement in a wilderness.

A short review of some of the principal enactments regarding grain may not be uninteresting. At one period of the history of Britain the only law relating to grain was the prohibition to export it. The “wisdom of our ancestors” at *that time* did not imagine that a country could possibly be ruined by an over abundance in the supply of either corn, beef, or mutton. This discovery was reserved for later days. In the reign of Edward IV. the first act was passed prohibiting the importation of foreign grain, but only when the price of wheat did not exceed 6s. 8d. per quarter. It was said to be for the benefit of the “poor farmers,” (this cant phrase is not of yesterday,) as they might be ruined from the plentifullness of the supply. Then, as yet, I suppose “poor landlords” had no interest in high prices, and the “poor buyers” could always shift for themselves. King William, in 1688, secured the firm alliance of the landed interest, by not only extending the acts prohibiting importation, but by granting bounties on grain exported. Millions sterling were thus expended, which both raised the prices at home and enabled foreigners to eat British food at least 20 per cent. lower than the resident native could do. The Corn Laws of 1773 and 1791 were improvements upon this barbarous policy, both allowing importation at nominal duties, the former when wheat reached 48s. per quarter and the latter at 50s. and 54s. per quarter. But the laws prohibiting importation were practically inoperative, principally from a deficiency in the machinery for ascertaining the averages until a short time previous to the year 1773. By the law of 1815, however, importation was wholly prohibited until wheat reached 80s. per quarter. This was done with the avowed purpose of bolstering up the price to something about that sum. Farmers were found, and brought from various parts of the kingdom, to state in evidence to Parliamentary Committees that unless they obtained 80s. or 90s. per quarter for wheat, the great bulk of the wheat-growing lands would be thrown out of cultivation, and the whole population might ultimately be starved, as the world could not supply us with a single month’s provision. Fortunately, however, the result has since shown that high money rents were the only things incompatible with lower rates. The law of 1815 was the first that practically secured a monopoly of the home market to the British grower. It was then thought that, as we could not grow a sufficient quantity of food for

our own population, the legislature had it in their power to fix the minimum price at which grain should be sold. We all know the bitter disappointment of those who entered into contracts and leases with that idea. A few years' experience made a solvent tenant almost a rarity. Notwithstanding these attempts to produce a continued artificial famine, a large importation of foreign grain taking place immediately previous to, and joined to the good crop of 1822, reduced prices one half, or wheat to 40s. per quarter. Then, again, we had Parliamentary Committees, but they could not report where the evil lay, because it did not happen to occur to them that rent had anything to do with the distress of the farmer. But I need not remind of this period those "poor farmers" who were obliged to sell their crop to pay a rent which they had agreed to give by calculating the price of grain at double what they could then obtain. Much persuasion surely cannot be required to satisfy them of both the danger and the folly of attempting to obtain famine prices in ordinary seasons. Neither shall I attempt to convince the wealthy, who could afford to store up their own crop, or buy that of their poorer neighbours, because I acknowledge at once that, for them, this system "*of a hunger and a burst*" wrought admirably, whatever wretchedness it produced to other members of society. The law of 1828 was a new plan to prevent importation by means of a sliding scale of duties; but as it has been confessed by all parties to have proved only beneficial to gambling speculators, it has been tinkered anew, and, as the bill of Sir Robert Peel, it has been again placed on the statute book during the last session of parliament. It is clear, however, that this supposed amendment was not meant to go to the root of the evil, (and indeed this was not even pretended by Sir Robert Peel,) but was intended to keep the price of wheat at 56s. per quarter, which has now been discovered to be a fair price, though we have seen that little more than twenty years ago farmers asserted that 80s., and some even 90s. per quarter was the lowest sum that wheat in this country could be raised for.

I have noticed only a few of the parliamentary enactments regarding grain, for there have been at least fifty during the last 200 years; but they all proceed upon the same short-sighted policy of endeavouring to extract the last penny from the buyers. Yet, notwithstanding all these laws, and the most complete monopoly of the home market that laws could give, how often have we heard of agricultural distress? distress which I know to have been no phantom of the imagination! *Parliament* has been besieged with petitions which should have been presented to the *landlords*. Committees have sat inquiring into the causes of the distress, but which only diverted the

practical agriculturist from the right remedy which was at hand—the reduction of his rent. These artificial famine laws compel British farmers to occupy a singular position,—they are ruined, not by bad crops, but by the very richness of the blessings of a bountiful Providence. Such a startling fact at once begets suspicion in the mind that the position must be a false one. This may be converted into certainty by a perusal of the evidence given before the Agricultural Committee of 1836. There you will find that though for years no foreign grain had been in the market, yet that farmers paying money rents were distressed, while those whose rents were regulated by the price of grain had no cause of complaint. Corn bills, by raising prices in ordinary years, raise rents ; but in years of superabundance, or after a large importation of the accumulated stocks of the continent, with even a moderate crop, these rates cannot be maintained ; then high rents cannot be paid ; and thus a money rent, which is only fair to a landlord in ordinary seasons, is so very hazardous to a tenant with a moderate capital.

As a tenant farmer, in an exclusively arable district of Scotland, paying a rent depending upon the price of grain, and averaging for several years past upwards of £1500 a year, for a farm possessing no peculiar advantages from vicinity to a market town, or anything of the kind ; and upon a lease, originally of twenty-one years, of which there are a considerable number yet to run, and during which period repayment is confidently expected of large sums already expended in thorough draining with tiles more than five hundred acres, and otherwise improving and enriching the farm; thus situated, I should rejoice were the corn laws to be abolished whenever parliament meets, as I am satisfied that, *with a rent properly adjusted*, the skill and capital of the British farmer require no privilege that is unjust to the other classes of society; and I am by no means singular in holding these views. Many, whose hearts are with us, are silent from *prudential* motives ; yet we know the sentiments of the Roxburghshire tenants, as testified by the gentleman (himself a farmer) who seconded the nomination of the Hon. J. Elliot in the last contest for that county ; and also from what took place in the Haddington district of burghs, where almost all the farmers in the neighbourhood of North Berwick, who had votes, polled for the Free Trade candidate ; and six or seven of these farmers each pay from £1000 to £1500 a year of rent. But it is unnecessary to extend examples ; all farmers must know that what is so injurious to the other members of the community cannot possibly be ultimately beneficial to them ; that, in fact, the success of agriculture depends wholly upon the prosperity of our manufac-

tures ; that it is this prosperity which makes agricultural produce of more value in Britain than in any other country in the world. But unless we are contented with the great natural advantages we possess in our proximity to the market, we shall assuredly starve to death “the goose that lays the golden eggs.” It is matter of history that the farmers and gardeners in the neighbourhood of London keenly opposed in parliament bills that were introduced for the purpose of repairing and extending the public roads, because they said it would deprive them of their “natural monopoly” of the market of the metropolis; they said they paid much higher rents, and labour was much more expensive than what it was in the country,—precisely the arguments now used against the admission of foreign corn; but, fortunately for themselves, they were not listened to. London has grown and increased in size, and land and its productions have become of more value than ever. It is thus that the landlords themselves will be benefitted in the end ; for may we not anticipate the same improvement and increase of population as has taken place in London for the kingdom at large, when the highways to it shall be cleared, not only of sliding scale bills, but of all turnpike charges for the exclusive benefit of any party whatever ?

There is one reason often urged against the possibility of cultivating the soil and raising crops in this country without a monopoly of the home market, viz., *the expenses of cultivation*. I solicit the attention of my brother farmers to this question. It is admitted that the nominal price of labour is much lower on the continent than here, but when the quantity of work done is taken into account, this difference vanishes. In the principal wheat-growing countries, the labourer is at least four months in the year confined within doors, by the intense frost which seals up his rivers, and the snow which covers the ground; the burning heat of summer equally incapacitates him from the heavy labours of the field; whilst here both men and horses are actively employed on the farm every day in the year. And with perhaps the exception of America, where money wages are much higher and grain lower than here, there is no country in the world where the labourers bring the same spirit, activity, and intelligence to their work as they do in Britain ; so that a far less proportion of produce is consumed by the labourers and cattle together, in raising any given quantity of grain, than what is required on the continent. But without insisting on this, I hold that, in farming operations in this country, the actual expenditure, in money, irrespective of the price of produce, is not by any means so large as to render necessary the present prohibitive system. I confess that, personally, I am but little acquainted with the methods of

cultivation pursued in many parts of England; but I know well how matters are conducted in the best cultivated districts of Scotland, and I should imagine that what is found to answer well in this more northern region, would be found to be equally suitable on the richer soil, and with the more genial clime of England. In Scotland one man and a pair of horses are found amply sufficient to till properly sixty imperial acres, even under the six-course shift, or with one-sixth only in grass. The horses are, of course, kept entirely on the produce of the land, and it matters nothing to the farmer whether the food so consumed by them be either high or low in price. The ploughman himself never, in Scotland, receives his wages wholly in money, but he is oftener paid in full with the produce of the farm, having, besides different quantities of grain, his cow kept, &c. But admitting that his wages are wholly money, and call them 10s. per week, which is the hire for day labourers, who lose time by wet weather and other casualties, this does not amount to 9s. per acre on the sixty acres so managed. And I know, from practical experience, that over a farm under ordinary management, all the other outgoings payable in money, taking wrights', smiths', and saddlers' accounts, cash paid for clover seeds, public burdens, labourers' and harvest wages, need not exceed in amount 15s. per imperial acre; so that this, added to the ploughman's wages, if these are to be paid in cash, amounts to but twenty-five shillings the imperial acre, and which sum would be considerably reduced were there to be a permanent reduction in the price of food. You must consider also, that there are various modes of management, by some of which manual labour may be much more dispensed with than by the six-course shift, which, in Scotland, is reckoned the most expensive rotation. From anything, therefore, that appears, regarding the expenses of cultivation, it is not at all likely that any portion of land now cultivated will be thrown into pasture by any fall in the price of grain. That it may check the rendering waste land arable is conceded, but if it has been already improved, and at present yields sufficient to feed the men and horses employed upon it, and leaves a surplus as rent to the landlord, whatever the price of that surplus may be, it will still continue to do so. Nothing can prevent this except the labourer getting a greater share of the produce, which would be a most decisive proof of the national prosperity. But as beef and mutton always bear a relative proportion in their price to that of grain, so if, from the low price of the latter, land will not yield a rent, the proprietor can hardly expect it from raising the former. In the vicinity of large towns, or in densely populated countries, pasture grass for dairy purposes, and for the con-

venience of stock, will always command high rents. At present, in the immediate neighbourhood of Edinburgh, £8 to £10 per acre is a common rent for pasture fields, for which, if they were a few miles distant from the town, half those sums would be thought extravagant.

Perhaps you may have seen statements, by agricultural writers, of the expenses of cultivation and the value of the produce of a farm, and the difference exhibited between high and moderate prices, showing results apparently disastrous enough. If, however, you examine these statements narrowly, you will observe that an obvious fallacy pervades the whole, even where the different expenses appear to be fairly given. This consists in every thing being converted into money, such as expenses of keeping horses, cows, &c., and the price of seed, corn, &c., *whereas, were these and the landlord's rent deducted in grain, as they ought to be,* and if the tenant had, as his share, one hundred or two hundred quarters of wheat, or other grain, according to circumstances, it would then be seen that there was little if any cause of complaint.

I fearlessly appeal to you, my brother farmers throughout the kingdom, if there is not a mighty deal of humbug vented about the price necessary to remunerate the farmer, and about the expense of raising grain. You and I both know well that these depend almost, if not altogether, upon the *rent*. It is high money rents that make farmers sometimes think corn too cheap, and that is too often the cause of all their perplexing anxieties. When markets are high, farms are taken at such rents as if prices never could by any possibility fall lower, and then not seldom the tenant exists, as such, only by the generosity of his landlord, or bankruptcy and ruin follow. Free Trade would do away in part with that ruinous competition among farmers for land, by opening up other and more profitable investments for capital; while, by steadyng the markets, which, by widening the range from whence the supplies are drawn, it would unquestionably do, it would enable us farmers to know something near what prices might be expected in ordinary seasons, and to frame our calculations accordingly. For it is those violent fluctuations that derange all our economy. No doubt if an individual occupies a farm on lease, at a money rent, it is his interest to obtain and keep up the price of grain as high as possible; but the moment his lease expires, a corresponding advance to the rise in the price of grain takes place in his rent, and justly too. But where the *rent* is regulated by the price of grain, which is by far the simplest and the safest measure of value, it is a matter of comparative indifference to the farmer what the price may be. In truth, it is then sometimes

his interest to have that price very moderate. I allude to those years, (of which we have had several lately,) when we are unable, from deficient crops, to sell as much grain as we pay in rent to the landlord; whatever number of quarters we may want is still to be paid for; so the lower in price that it is calculated at, the better for us. Certainly, if we could get a high price with a good crop, we should make more money, but even in this country high prices and abundant crops rarely go together. It is only when we have little to sell that great prices are obtained. It must be obvious, then, that a corn bill that prevents the regular importation of grain into a country like Britain, must be a crying evil, even to farmers. A sliding scale of duties appears to be solely calculated to accumulate stores of grain, until, perhaps, immediately before the harvest, when the grain is almost wholly out of the hands of farmers; then only do prices reach that pitch to enable the importer to pay, or rather avoid paying, the duty, when the whole is thrown upon the market, just as we, the home growers, begin to dispose of our new crop. This has happened repeatedly; and what has taken place this season is a beautiful illustration of the working of such a measure. We had hardly got into security a most abundant crop of the finest quality, when the market was flooded by an accumulated stock of upwards of two millions of quarters of foreign wheat and about five hundred thousand cwts. of flour being suddenly thrown upon it. Had this wheat and flour been brought to market during the summer, as it was landed, (without noticing the advantage it would have been to our famishing population,) there cannot be a doubt but that now we should have been getting much higher prices for the crop we are disposing of. But it was kept in bond when we farmers had little or nothing to sell, and liberated just in time to forestall our market; so that in this instance the law, professedly framed for our advantage, has operated in a manner injurious to our interests. But a sliding scale will always have this effect, over and above attracting the attention of speculators exclusively to foreign corn, however low in price home produce may be. Men will take shares in lotteries. Besides, for every shilling grain rises, there is the additional advantage of the *fall* in the duty, so that there is a profit two ways. If the prices rise and the duty falls to 12s. or 10s., it may still fall to 8s. or 6s., and then, if kept still longer out of the market, it may be got out of bond at the nominal duty. Of the 12,000,000 of quarters of foreign wheat which we have imported within the last five years, more than two-thirds of it have been entered for home consumption, either immediately before or during the time of harvest, so that the new crop and the foreign supply come to market together. But it is

an invariable law of Providence that every attempt, whether through ignorance or design, to possess unjust advantages, recoils upon the heads of the offenders.

The uncertain nature of our demand for foreign grain causes the country to pay *higher* prices than would be the case with a regular trade; it also occasions heavy demands for specie, and compels the banks, for safety to themselves, to limit their circulation ; it cramps trade and restricts the means of consumers ; and in a short time it tells upon the agriculturist by a falling off in the demand in his market also. It is absurd to say that corn is the only article of trade that foreigners will not exchange unless for gold, especially when coupled with another common allegation, that they are so ready to sell it for such a small quantity indeed of the precious metals. Let the trade be regular, and grain will be grown for England ; our manufactures will be readily taken in exchange, and our merchants will only require bills to enable them to square their accounts. But when we, as we now do, intercept the grain intended for others, according to all the laws of trade, *gold* can alone be taken in return for that grain.

Farmers without leases should have little cause to complain of free trade in grain, as they can have no difficulty in making new arrangements with their landlords, if such shall be found necessary. Those paying *grain rents*, we have shown, do not require any alteration. There remain however those tenants with leases, paying *money rents*, who may be entitled to relief so far by act of parliament, as that their money rents should be converted into grain at the average prices of the last five or six years, and be regulated for the future accordingly. Supposing that the said average price for wheat should be found to be £3 per quarter (less or more,) then for every £3 of rent now paid, the price of one quarter of wheat should be paid hereafter. Justice demands that this be done, and nothing more.

I may here allude to what is well understood as a fact, that, in many parts of England, *leases* are rarely granted by the landlords to their tenantry. Now, this I would consider “to be a heavy blow, and sore discouragement to agriculture.” Landlords who refuse leases can have but an equivocal title to be ranked among “the farmers’ friends.” A lease, for a period of not less than nineteen or twenty-one years, is an absolute requisite to obtain correct or even economical management, or anything like the largest possible produce at the least possible expense. What tenant would for a moment think of expending on a farm £6 or £8 per acre, for draining, or of annually buying foreign manure, to cover, perhaps, the fourth of his farm, or even to erect a steam thrashing machine,

which so economises labour, while his rent was liable to be raised upon him the next year, or he himself be turned to the rightabout? Assuredly Scotsmen would hardly think any land worth occupying without a lease, unless at such a rent as would be little more than an acknowledgment of the landlord's superiority. It is these leases giving a temporary property in the soil, a property that is heritable, though not alienable, which has been the main spring in raising Scottish husbandry to the position it now holds.

There is one argument in favour of Free Trade, which will reach both the judgment and the feelings of every farmer who is a parent. What is to become of our sons and daughters, if the manufactures and commerce of the country cease to offer an opening for them? Farmers' sons cannot be all farmers, nor can their daughters all find settlements amongst their own class. We cannot, like the privileged orders, quarter our younger sons upon the State, or find them employment in the army, church, or colonies. They must push their fortunes in trade. A farmer with six children may probably keep a son and a daughter at home; but the other four will, in all probability, depend for their prospects in life upon the prosperity of trade and manufactures. In such a case, the family are more interested in trade than farming, in the proportion of two to one. With every parent, possessing natural affections, to whose heart his offsprings' welfare is dearer than his own, this view of the question will have great weight. Let it be remembered, at the same time, that if there is no opening for the younger members of the agricultural body in the towns, they will be forced back upon the soil, either to be supported out of the labour of others, or to bid against their neighbours for farms, and to raise rents and diminish profits. In fact, nothing can be more clear than that the trade of farming cannot long survive the ruin of manufactures and commerce.

I sometimes wonder that my brother farmers have never asked themselves this question—"Have we, as a class of capitalists, been more prosperous than other classes of traders?" Take for instance the grocers, linen drapers, or innkeepers, of your neighbouring market towns. Take the average of those engaged in any of these trades with a capital of say £2,000; then take the average of farmers, similarly circumstanced, and I ask you, which party, at the end of a dozen years, upon an average, has realized the most money? I know your answer will be in favour of the grocers, drapers, and innkeepers. How is this to be reconciled with the notion we have been taught to entertain by the landowners, that the farmers are especially protected? There have been no laws passed under the pretence of giving protection to drapers, grocers, or innkeepers; there are not

a large number of landlords owning the grocers' shops in parliament professing to watch over *their* interests; and yet the retail grocers are more prosperous as a body than you. Surely this is enough to awaken your suspicions of the delusiveness (to use no harsher term) of all those promises which political landlords make to you at the hustings, or at agricultural dinners. But let me further ask, did you ever know the entire body of grocers, or any other trade, to be up in arms at the same time all over England complaining of distress? You may have known bankruptcies and losses to fall upon particular individuals, but did you ever know the whole body of any particular trade throughout the kingdom calling exclusively to Parliament at the same time to relieve them? No, such a thing never happened, and never can occur. Yet, we have known the farmers of England, in a body, five times complaining of *unparalleled* distress, since the passing of the famous law for their protection in 1815, and appealing to parliament for the relief of their sufferings, and this generally happened when trade and manufactures were comparatively prosperous! Will not such facts as these induce you to doubt whether the law which interferes with your trade, with no better result than these, had not better be totally and immediately repealed?

Upon this subject of protection, let me remind you that you have always secured to you the *natural* protection of the cost of bringing the corn from distant countries. Upon an average, I believe the freight and other charges, upon corn imported from the Baltic or America, amount to ten shillings a quarter. Now this, I say, is a *natural* protection, which nobody can deprive you of. Supposing you grow four quarters of wheat an acre, this protection of ten shillings a quarter is equal to two pounds an acre.

Let me offer an opinion as to the *mode* of repealing the Corn Law. It is apparent to every observing man that a tax upon bread will not be permanently borne in any shape. Neither fixed duties nor sliding scales will much longer be tolerated. Public opinion has decreed the overthrow of the entire system of miscalled protection, and the question now is one of *time* only. I have a strong conviction that nothing can be so unfavourable to your interests as the lingering death of the Corn Law. Whatever modifications take place short of total repeal, the burden will be thrown, if possible, under all sorts of pretences, upon the farmers. The experience of the late changes in the Tariff and the Corn Law has shown this pretty plainly. The landowners have laboured to convince you, at your recent agricultural gatherings, that the alterations in the late session have had little effect upon prices. They still try to assure you that *the law* will afford you ample protection. But, even

if the law did protect you, (which it never did and never will,) what guarantee have you that the political landowners will not come to an agreement again in London next session, as they did in the last, with Sir Robert Peel, and consent to another alteration? Depend upon it, there is no chance of your coming to a satisfactory adjustment of rents and leases, *so long as you allow the intervention of politics in your bargains with the landowners.* Politics may be a winning game to those who have their own arrangements to make with the minister of the day, but I pity the case of the farmer who reckons any Corn Law for the value of a farthing, in making a bargain for his farm with his landlord. So long as the owners of your farms can point to a *law*, as a reason for obtaining a certain price for their produce, you will in no case be able to make a safe agreement for the use of their land. Get rid of all such interferences with your dealings at once. Let the Corn Laws be totally and immediately repealed, and then every tenant throughout the kingdom will at once be brought on fair terms to a settlement with his landlord. Public opinion and the necessities of the case will then force an equitable adjustment of rents and leases; and the dealings between landlord and tenant will thenceforth settle down into mere matters of business, with which politics will no longer interfere.

I now address myself to you—the farm labourers, for it is unblushingly declared that it is on your account, too, that we enjoy a Corn Bill. If you have attended to the preceding remarks, you will have observed what I think I have satisfactorily established, that, though the Bread Tax was abolished to-morrow, we should still possess the fertile soil of Britain, and that ploughing, sowing, and harrowing would go on much as usual. It has been said that, with low-priced food, a reduction in wages would immediately follow, but we see high-priced grain in Ireland, and wages from 8d. to 1s. a day, while the same quantity of labour, in America, with low-priced food, would earn a dollar, or 4s. 2d.; so that it must be an undoubted proposition that the wages of labour, like everything else, depend upon the supply and the demand. The only real connection between wages and the price of food is, simply, that the labourer's wages must be sufficient at least to keep soul and body together, while all past history proves that abundant seasons, or a plentiful supply of food, tend to raise both the real and nominal wages of labour. When the means of living is cheap, many labourers are tempted to leave their masters and become independent workmen. A large number of farm servants throughout the kingdom lodge and board with their masters, their board and lodging being usually esteemed equivalent to about half their wages; so that, when

food is cheap, many farmers prefer (correctly for their own interest) taking on more hands, to sending the subsistence fund to market. This demand occasionally raises the money wages paid to the labourers. When provisions are easily obtained, labourers can afford to be occasionally idle; at least, they are not so readily obliged to agree to the terms offered by masters as in dear years, which so increase the difficulty of obtaining subsistence, that workmen are glad to close with the first offer of employment. But it is not so long since 1836. You may remember the demand for labour, the rate of wages, and the price of grain at that time, and compare it with what you experienced last year. It has been found that, in every country, wages are high in proportion as the people are increasing in wealth; that however wealthy a nation may be, if that wealth be stationary, wages are very moderate; but when a nation retrogrades, the working classes die off from absolute starvation. Now, free and unrestricted commerce is the only means that can give Britain a chance to continue to progress; without it we must even go back. When it is recollected that millions in this country exist by manufacturing goods for foreign markets, which our own policy is constantly losing us, this will be at once conceded. Unless this policy is speedily changed, and we accept, as payment for our manufactures, American flour, Dantzic wheat, Baltic timber, and Brazilian sugar, an immense proportion of our population must inevitably be starved off through famine, which God forbid! or, what is almost equally to be deprecated, compete with you, the agricultural labourers, in your already over-stocked market. If there is one class more interested than another in this great question, it is you. With the impetus which every one admits Free Trade in food would give to our manufacturing body, I ask, is it too much to expect, that at least a portion of your number would be drawn off to that class, and thus leave a better remuneration to those who should remain? An additional demand for manufactures would raise the price of goods, and increase the profits of capital; workmen would be better paid, so that they and their families might enlarge their consumption of agricultural produce, to the benefit of all classes.

An intelligent farmer and shrewd writer,\* at the close of last century, objected to Free Trade in corn on this ground amongst others, that it would raise the wages of agricultural labourers, while the farmer, by the admission of foreign corn, would be prevented remunerating himself by enhancing the price of his produce. Can there,

\* Mackie's Supplement to Diorom on the Corn Laws. Edinburgh:  
William Creech. 1796.

then, be two ways of thinking, as to which side of the question your interest lies? Assuredly not.

After what has been stated, I call upon every *elector* especially, to dispassionately consider this question of questions, as well as the signs of the times. I am no alarmist. I have no dread of dependence on foreigners, even for food. The large importations we at present annually make show that we have come to that already, as well as for other things almost equally necessary. Neither am I afraid of war, knowing, as I do, that Free Trade is our best guarantee for peace; and that “*were subjects wise, war is a game kings would not play at.*” But I do look with anxiety on the great and extended unions of the working classes, with the Chartist lecturer in every village, pointing to the palace of the wealthy and the wretched hovel of the workman. I am afraid of our institutions when he can say, “*You tell us we are unfit to govern ourselves, and you show your fitness to rule by robbing us with your bread tax.*” Property, whether in land or in accumulated capital, has unquestionably its rights; but is labour, the sole property of the masses, to be less sacredly regarded? Preventing tradesmen and mechanics from disposing of their labour in the best market, by refusing to allow them to take in exchange for it food, the staff of life, is certainly class legislation of the most odious description. With the world for our market, and wise and beneficial laws adjusting fairly to the shoulders of all the heavy weight of our grinding taxation, I have no fear, but a confident anticipation, that a long career of onward progress and prosperity still awaits our beloved land; that our population, increasing even now almost a thousand souls a day, may become so numerous and wealthy that even the cancelling of our untold debt may be readily accomplished. Suicidal madness alone prevents commerce in what is most essential of all, *food* for the millions of her people.

GEORGE HOPE.

Fenton Barns, by Haddington, N. B., 26th October, 1842.

AGRICULTURE

AND

THE CORN LAW.

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PRIZE ESSAY.

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SHewing THE

INJURIOUS EFFECTS OF THE CORN LAW

UPON

TENANT FARMERS, AND FARM LABOURERS.

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BY ARTHUR MORSE.

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MANCHESTER:  
HAYCRAFT, PRINTER, 11, BROWN STREET.

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## PRIZE ESSAYS.

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### AGRICULTURE AND THE CORN LAWS.

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The Council of the National Anti-Corn Law League hereby offer the following PRIZES for the BEST PRACTICAL ESSAYS, each not to exceed sixteen pages octavo, demonstrating the Injurious Effects of the Corn Laws on Tenant Farmers and Farm Labourers, and the Advantages which those classes would derive from its Total and Immediate Repeal:—

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THE COUNCIL HAVE AWARDED THE HIGHEST PRIZE TO EACH OF THE THREE ACCOMPANYING ESSAYS.

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## PRIZE ESSAY.

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To protect and encourage agriculture has for many years been regarded by our legislators as the stepping stone to prosperity, and the foundation of wealth and power; but whatever may have been the results of its supposed encouragement and protection, nothing can be more clear, than that though for a time the profits of tenant farmers may be raised by a law unduly raising the price of corn, yet that in the end the profits of farming must be regulated, not by the profits of that particular trade, but by the profits and well being of other trades generally. It is impossible to doubt, and indeed every man's experience would tell him, that if the profits of farming are large, and with a prospect of continuance, people from other trades whose profits were not so large, and even farmers themselves, would so bid against one another, as speedily to bring the rent of land to its proper and actual value, according to the increased price of corn.

But it would be wrong to suppose that the profits of farming were always to be estimated by the amount of rent that is paid in any one year, or even series of years, for the history of the prices of corn shows us that it is one of the most variable of all articles of human consumption; and it also shows us, that independently of artificial causes, such as war, a derangement of the currency, or laws regulating the import and export of corn, it is affected by seasons frequently for many years together of a very abundant kind, and these followed again by many very deficient years. To say with any degree of certainty, therefore, what should be the amount of rent for any future year, must always be a matter of the greatest difficulty, but still it is obvious that a period of rising prices, when neither the landlord nor the farmer has calculated upon a rising rent, must be a season of prosperity to the farmer, and a period of falling prices when a farmer is paying a rent calculated on high prices, must be equally a period of great loss to him.

The object of our corn laws, according to the avowed intentions of our legislators, professes to be to maintain a high and steady

price of corn, and if they did accomplish this end there could be no shadow of doubt as to the benefit they would confer on the tenant farmer, but that they have succeeded in no one of these results, I think events have most fully proved.

The high prices of corn which were attained in this country at the close of the war, from the accumulated effects of bad seasons, the increase of wealth and population, and the formidable obstacles thrown in the way of importation by war, had led our farmers and legislators to form extravagant ideas of the price the country could afford to pay, and of the price at which corn could be afforded to be grown, and led to the passing of the act of parliament in 1815, by which wheat was not allowed to be imported for home consumption until the price had reached 80s. a quarter. For some time previous to this period the home price had been so high as scarcely to be affected by the duty on importation.

The corn law of 1815, aided by deficient harvests, had certainly the effect of maintaining prices considerably above what they would otherwise have been, but still during the whole period the act remained in force, from 1815 to 1822, the price of wheat averaged but 69s. a quarter, and in the last three of these years 1820, 1821, and 1822, the price was respectively 65s. 10d., 54s. 5d., and 43s. 3d. a quarter.

At this period we read of great distress among the farmers, public meetings held, and parliamentary committees appointed to inquire into the cause of the distress. The question why corn was low, and why it should not have been low, seems never to have entered into any one's head ; the question always was, why was it not high, and why should not acts of parliament be made to keep up the price ? It never appears to have occurred to farmers why rents and tithes, and the various outgoings upon a farm were high, nor do they ever appear to have entertained a doubt of the power of the legislature to maintain prices, or to make the trade of farming a better trade than other trades, which it must always be borne in mind is one of the necessary inferences of a corn law. With a view of allaying the fears of the agriculturist, and probably reflecting also that the importation of corn at a time when it was needed, might in some degree be of benefit to the community, and indirectly to the farmer, a new law was framed upon a rather more liberal basis than the old, but still of such a restrictive nature, as more than once to require the liberation of foreign corn as a temporary expedient.

The average price of wheat during the time this act remained in force from 1823 to 1828 inclusive, was 59s. a quarter.

In 1828 a new law was passed on a still more liberal basis than either of the two previous laws, and has been in force from that time to the present year. The years 1834, 1835, and 1836, were again periods of agricultural distress; and from the evidence taken before a committee of the House of Commons in 1836, it appears, that with the exception of the Scotch farmers who farmed upon corn rents, farmers generally were making no profits, and in many instances living upon their capital. On one point they generally agreed, that the agricultural labourer was never in more comfortable circumstances than he was at that time.

Since 1815 the farmer appears to have survived under prices, constantly falling from 69s. during the first period to 59s. in the second, and under the third from 1828 to 1839 of 57s. 7d.

Such is the history of the farming interest since the war, and it appears to corroborate what I before observed, that a period of falling prices must inevitably be a period of loss to the farmer.

While the hope has been held out to the farmer that the price of agricultural produce would be sustained, rent has fallen but little, and in many instances it has increased. Had the fall in agricultural produce been sudden, (like the fall of manufactured goods,) as undoubtedly it would at the close of the war, had no protection been extended, there can be no doubt but that there would have been a great and sudden fall of rent. The loss would then have fallen on the landlord, which now has fallen almost entirely on the tenant. Farmers on a low rental, and with leases, would then have reaped all the advantage and profits to be derived from improved modes of cultivation, which under the fancied security of the corn law, has now gone into the landlord's pocket in the shape of rent. There would then have been the probability to the farmer, instead of farming against a constantly falling price of corn, of having a constantly rising price. But it may be said that had all protection been withdrawn at the close of the war, the race of farmers existing at the time would have been swept from the land by so sudden a change. That it would have been a period of loss to the farmer I will not deny, but one which was unavoidable, and has since taken place to a greater extent. The high prices of the war had not been brought about by legislative interference, but by natural causes, over which parliament had no controul. It had been a period of great prosperity to landlords, and during which farmers had made large

fortunes. It was to both a period of unmixed and gratuitous benefit, and they had not the slightest ground or pretence to ask of the nation to perpetuate such a state of things. They had derived all the profits from the high prices, and when the natural causes of the high prices no longer existed, it was but reasonable and just that high prices should cease. The war had left no taxes or burdens that were not more than shared by the rest of the community; and though some expenses of farming had risen with the high prices, yet most would speedily have fallen and adjusted themselves to low prices. Labour would not perhaps have fallen in the same ratio with corn for reasons which I shall presently give, but horsekeeping, tithes, poor-rates, seed corn, and rents, must all have fallen in a very near proportion to the price of corn. The farmer had not been encouraged by acts of parliament to pay a high rent, nor could he have complained of parliament not doing that which it had never promised to do. The men who had profited most by the high prices might not have been the identical men who were in occupation of their farms in 1815; but then it would have been as fair that the farmers of 1815 should have borne the loss as the farmers of 1822, or the farmers of 1835. But still the loss to the farmer was not a question as to time altogether, it was a question of amount also, for we have had lower prices occasionally since, than we ever should have had with a free trade; and it is also unquestionable that the loss would have been largely shared by the landlord, had it taken place in the first instance.

It will hardly be disputed that the corn laws have not been successful in preventing very low prices of corn, or that they have not succeeded in maintaining a rising price, which, of all things, is of the most essential benefit to the farmer. That a free trade would operate powerfully in accomplishing these ends there are very good reasons to suppose. Upon a view of the situation of this country as to the importation of corn, we find that in years of abundance the prohibitory duties have so operated as to prevent any importation at all, and that the trade in corn has been of such a precarious nature, and of so small an amount, as not to form an article of regular and increasing supply from abroad; and in one year, since the passing of the law of 1828, we have actually been an exporting country. Now the interest of the farmer is to maintain and encourage such an amount of importation as shall, from the increased wealth and population of the country, render it absolutely impossible that the home-growth could ever equal the demand. Let the quantity grown at home be ever so great, it is still the interest of

the farmer that the consumption of the country should be greater. If with a free trade, instead of the present annual importation of one or two millions of quarters, we had five or six millions, it would be impossible that the low prices of 1821 and 1822, or 1835 and 1836, could ever again occur, for it would be impossible, under such circumstances, that we could be an exporting country. Nor would it be a small remuneration to the farmer if, instead of 39s. 4d., the price of wheat in 1835, it were 46s. or 48s., which would be at least the difference between an importing and an exporting price. It is not the interest of the farmer, as our pro-corn law advocates tell us, to be independent of foreigners, and to grow enough for our own consumption, for it is not the interest of the farmer that prices should be the same here as abroad; and it must always be a protection to the farmer that the freights and expenses of sending corn to this country should be incurred by the foreigner, and that at no time we should cease to import corn. That corn would be at a high price under a free trade, I do not think possible, or even desirable, but that it must gradually increase in price, I think the situation and circumstances of this country render probable. Though there is still much waste land in the country capable of being cultivated, and much land already under cultivation capable of improvement, yet the importation required would be very great; and as soon as countries near to England had disposed of their surplus produce, we should have to go further for our supplies, and the more distant the ports from which we have to obtain them the higher must be the freights and expenses. The price of corn would thus be naturally enhanced to the producer in England, and being paid for, as it must be, in manufactured goods of some kind or other, would not be felt as a burden or an injury by the rest of the community. It is not altogether a low price, but the power and liberty to exchange with other countries that we want. The price would then be yielded by willing wealth that is now wrung from poverty, and our landlords and farmers would find to their surprise that there are high prices of two kinds; one caused by deficiency in one particular article, and the other by general abundance of all useful articles. By the first of these two methods of obtaining high prices, they have attempted to benefit their own class, by keeping corn out of the country, and the result has been disappointment to themselves, and misery and suffering to others, by the second mode—by letting corn come into the country, other classes will be benefitted, and will live in ease and abundance; and from this ease and abundance will flow those remunerating and steady

prices, and that prosperity which have in vain been sought for in acts of parliament.

That the prices of corn in this country should have been appealed to in support of the arguments that our corn laws have caused steadiness of price, is indeed strange, when prices in England have been more variable during the last thirty years than those of any country we are acquainted with ; and when the variations that have taken place from the highest to the lowest price, under the law of 1815, amount to no less than  $199\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., and under the law of 1828, to 129 per cent. It may be said that the nature of this country would have given, under any circumstances, a more unsteady price than other countries ; but upon examination I think we shall find there are abundant reasons for supposing the contrary to be the case. It cannot be said that a narrow market is more steady than an extended one ; nor can it be said that a country would have more steady prices were it excluded so entirely from the rest of the world as to have no importation of corn, whatever might be the wants of the inhabitants ; nor can it be said that it is the nature of highly civilized and populous countries to be more variable in price than countries in a rude and barbarous state. The whole tendency of improved cultivation, and a higher and better kind of farming, is to make corn more steady in price, and if any country in the world should have been steady from this cause it is England. From the maritime situation of England, and the great command of a variety of climates, and variety of markets, the argument is still stronger in favour of steady prices, for they are advantages in which respect few countries are similarly situated.

Though it is my opinion that prices would advance slowly under a free trade, yet, should prices remain stationary, there are many reasons to show why the trade of farming would improve under such circumstances. With low rents, low tithes, and low expenses, every improvement that is made in the implements of farming—every improvement that the farmer may himself make in the application or economy of labour, or the rearing or feeding of stock would, in the first instance, redound to his own advantage ; and not until a lease or tenancy was expired could the landlord take advantage of the improvements, instead of, as at present, anticipating improvements in the rent. In the natural course of things, when improvements become general, and the price of food reduced in consequence of them, the public reap the benefit, and not the individual farmer making them. But then the farmer, as one of the public, and as a consumer himself, participates in the increased

production, and so also the mechanic or manufacturer, and each and every class of the community who invents and increases the supply of articles useful or agreeable to man, in time surrenders his improvements to the public, and reserves to himself no more than the share necessary to his own individual consumption. In this, and in this way only, can increased production benefit the farmer; and if it can be shown that a steady and constantly increasing supply of corn, at a moderate and remunerating price, is the true interest of the public, there cannot be a doubt but that it is at the same time the true interest of the tenant farmer, and ultimately, the land-owner.

Though the advantage the **FARM LABOURER** would derive from the total and immediate repeal of the corn laws depends generally on the same principles that are necessary for the well-being of the farmer, yet there are other causes called into action which show that the labourer is more interested in a low price than the farmer.

The high price of corn in this country is a proof that in proportion to other articles it has a comparative scarcity, and in order to judge of the results, as affecting the wealth of the country in the particular article of corn, it is necessary to observe the mode in which the high price is brought about. Corn being a necessary of life, has a greater tendency to variation, from a sudden addition or contraction, than a luxury; and a small quantity thrown into the market more than usual, either from the effects of abundant seasons, or increased importation, has a very great effect in lowering prices, and the subtraction of a small portion has also considerable effect in raising prices. Though no very accurate proportion between a deficiency of crop and a rise of price can be established, yet there is a rule, by an old author, who says, that a defect of one-tenth raises the price above the common rate three-tenths, and a deficiency of two-tenths raises the price eight-tenths, and so on, increasing very rapidly with each increased deficiency. But whatever the actual proportion may be, there is no doubt that the principle is correct. To keep corn higher than our neighbours, it is merely necessary for us to keep a portion of corn out of the market, and as we can seldom grow enough for ourselves, the end of raising the price is at once and easily accomplished by prohibiting importation. To say that the deficient quantity is made up by an increase of our home growth, is not the fact, nor ever can be the fact, as long as the price is higher here than in other countries, and no importation allowed. The very

circumstance of a continued high price proves the existence of a continued deficiency; and it may fairly be inferred, that at least one or two millions of quarters of wheat are annually prevented by our corn law from coming into the country and being consumed. Whether this amount of corn was first produced, and then thrown into the sea, to raise the price of the remainder, or whether it is prohibited entering the country by law, is precisely the same thing.

It is not so much my object to prove that the money price of labour should be high, as that the actual condition of the labourer with reference to his command over the necessaries of life must increase with the increase of wealth in a country, and that with each increase of wealth the distribution will be more equal, by the labourer obtaining a larger share of the products of the earth for his own use than before.

The common sense and experience of mankind would tell us that cheap bread is better for a poor man than dear bread; and the first and most obvious answer to the question, why should it be so? is, because it is plentiful—its abundance is the cause of its cheapness. But it is asserted that the labourer's wages are generally reduced to such a price as to enable him to get but little more than the same amount of food at all times, with scarcely any increase in years of abundance. That this is very nearly the case in England is a lamentable fact, and partially but not wholly true. But it is not of what the condition of the labourer is, but of what it might be, that I have to speak. It is not that instances can be quoted which show that people in a state of political servitude and dependence may be constantly and permanently degraded in their situation, whatever may be the price of the necessaries of life. Of these there are unfortunately too many instances; but that other circumstances being equal, the condition of the working man must be advanced by the increased production of any article of his daily consumption, it is impossible to deny; that wages rise with a falling price of corn is the rule,—that they fall is the exception to the rule.

With regard to the distribution of the particular article of corn, through the various classes of society, it may be observed, that there is not much more consumed in the houses of the wealthy in years of abundance than in years of scarcity. The corn over and above the quantity consumed by the farmer or the producer of corn, must be brought to market and sold in course of

time, for it would not keep without injury, and the interest of the money would always prevent corn being held for many years together. Now if it should happen that either from an abundant harvest, or increased importation from abroad, the quantity of corn produced should suddenly or permanently amount to a million or two of quarters more than before, it is clear that the relative quantity of corn compared with the quantity of labourers in existence for the time being is altered. Instead of there being 90 quarters of corn to 100 labourers, there are 100 quarters of corn to 100 labourers. The farmer is a seller of corn, and the labourer is a large buyer and consumer of corn. Here is a bargain to be made between the two parties as to the amount of corn to be given for a certain quantity of work, and the principle that comes into operation here is precisely the same as that of two men going into the market, each with something to sell. One has apples and the other has eggs to dispose of. If apples are abundant and eggs are scarce, the man wishing to obtain eggs for his apples, must give a larger quantity of apples than he would have done if apples had been scarce. This is the principle which regulates the exchange of all commodities, of which man has a surplus to dispose of that he cannot consume himself; and it is this principle which operates in the same way between two men dealing, the one for labour and the other for corn. If corn is abundant, and a man is able to earn as much in four days as will keep him for six, it is not likely that he will give his other two days labour for nothing. Our corn laws alter the relative supply of labour and corn,—our corn laws make a provision that corn shall be less plentiful, but they make no provision that the number of the labourers should not increase—the relative supply of labour and corn is altered, and the consequence to the labourer is that he gets less for his share of the produce of the soil than he otherwise would.

The irregularity of the price of corn has been of serious injury to the labourer in more than one respect, for it has induced the habit on the part of the farmer of lowering the wages of the labourer, and the habit on the part of the labourer of submitting to the reduction. A rise in the price of labour seldom takes place until some time after a rise in the price of corn, and during these periods the habits and modes of living of the labourer are lowered, and many comforts are sacrificed. The condition and habits of the labourer thus reduced, enable the farmer to take advantage of a fall in the price of corn;

and, as is generally the case, the wages of the labourer are the first item in a farmer's expenses that the latter begins to curtail. Were the price of corn steady and the habits of the labourer improving, he would not submit to the reduction, and each improvement in agriculture which, under a free trade, would have the effect of lowering prices, would be participated in by the labourer, instead of being as at present entirely absorbed by the landlord and farmer. The labourer would then say—"Why should I continue to work and apply my labour to the land, without an increased share of the increased products, and why should the landlord and farmer, and tithe-owner, usurp all the increased production, and leave me in the same situation that I was in fifty years ago. Improvements in manufactures have made almost all kinds of clothing a third cheaper; we are better clad than our forefathers, why should we not be better fed also?" This would be a very fair argument for a labourer, and serves well to illustrate the effects of monopoly in corn, and free trade in clothing. How often do we hear people say that the working classes are dressing too fine, and above their situation? Why it only shows that articles of dress have become cheaper, and as a natural consequence the poor are better clad than they used to be. There has been no monopoly in manufacturing, and the consequence has been that the public have reaped the benefit. But with food the case is different. Of this there has been a monopoly, and the consequence has been that the people are not better fed than they used to be.

Though the money wages of agricultural labour have in many instances fallen with the price of corn during the last thirty years in England, yet they invariably form in cheap years a larger portion of the expenditure of a farmer than they do in dear years. In the out-goings of one farm with which I am acquainted, I find that the labour in a dear year formed 19 per cent. of the whole out-goings; and in years of comparative cheapness it formed 25 per cent. of the whole out-goings. Thus the labourer in the one case takes 25 per cent. of the produce for his share, and in the other case only 19. Though the proportion may not be the same upon all farms, still, I believe, the principle to be the same; and I have heard farmers say, that in some years of extraordinary cheapness it has taken nearly all their wheat crop to pay the labour. This has sometimes been made an objection among farmers to a repeal of the corn laws; that they

cannot get the price of labour down to a level with the price of corn. It would thus be necessary if the price of corn were to fall much, that rent should fall in a greater ratio to compensate the farmer for the increased proportion of the produce taken off by the labourer. A better proof, perhaps, cannot be given of the poverty and stationary physical existence of the agricultural labourer of this country, than the fact of his having been so habituated to wages rising and falling with the price of provisions, as to be scarcely sensible of the advantage of a steady price of corn. Well did Mr. Burke say—"The squires of Norfolk had dined when they gave it as their opinion that wages ought to rise and fall with the price of provisions." If they really did so it would involve the supposition that the rich alone should share the good things of this life, and that whatever may be the abundance in the land, the poor shall not partake.

The charitable feelings of some landlords and farmers, may at times keep the wages of labour higher than they might otherwise be, but this cannot exist every where, and if it did it would surely be better that the labourer should earn his bread by an honest independence than by the charity of the rich, and that he should obtain his wages as his right, and not as a favour bestowed by the patronage or caprice of the powerful.

America, perhaps, affords a better illustration of the principle that regulates the exchange of labour and food, than is to be found in England. It is a very general opinion, that because America is a newly settled country, the wages of labour are high merely on account of the vast quantity of fertile and uncultivated land, and that as the country becomes more densely peopled, the wages of labour will fall. The supposition usually is, that the reward of labour is highest in newly settled countries, and that with the progress of civilization it usually diminishes. But as far as the history of America will guide us, the very contrary appears to be the case. Instead of the population approaching nearer to the limits of human subsistence, it appears that food has increased faster than the population. The habits of industry, the light taxation, the high intelligence and general education of the people, appear to have rendered their condition as a producing nation the most prosperous on the face of the earth. The price of flour, by which we may obtain a tolerably correct estimate of the costs of other agricultural products,

appears to have gradually fallen in the last forty years. The price of a barrel of flour of 196lbs. appears to have been for the following periods:—

	Dols. Cts.
From 1795 to 1804 .....	9 37
„ 1805 to 1814 .....	8 24
„ 1815 to 1824 .....	7 44
„ 1825 to 1834 .....	5 36

which would be in our money, per stone of fourteen pounds, for the different periods respectively, about 2s. 9d., 2s. 5d., 2s. 2d., and 1s. 7d.

With other articles of agricultural produce, proportionably cheap, people here who say that wages rise and fall with the price of provisions might imagine that wages were in America about 9s. a week, and that people would be very well satisfied and contented upon that sum. But so far from this being the case, the usual price of a day's labour is now a dollar (4s. 2d.), and this high price appears to have had no connection with the price of flour during the whole of these periods, but to have been constantly increasing while the price of flour has been constantly diminishing. As the result of a certain quantity of labour at given periods, Mr. Carey, of Philadelphia, gives the following. In 1699, as appears from the books of William Penn, according to the price of flour, and the price of a day's work at that time, it would have taken a man,—

To earn a ton of flour .....	137 days
In 1790, wages being about 3s. a day, and flour having fallen, it would have taken.....	125 „
And, in 1834, wages having risen to about 4s., and flour having fallen still further, it would have taken.....	78 „

For an agricultural labourer in England, at the present day, with wages at 9s. a week, which would be about the average, and flour at 2s. a stone, it would require 213 days' labour to obtain a ton of flour.

There is also an absolute necessity for wages being high to enable people to purchase and consume large quantities of food, for if the increased food were not consumed by the working classes, it could not be consumed at all. Had the markets of England been open to the corn of America, there is no doubt but that the price of corn would have been lower in England, and more would have been consumed by the working classes. The proportion consumed by the working classes would have been larger, and the share of the capitalist

less. It would have been a matter of difficulty for the wealthy classes to have kept down the price of labour, even had other circumstances been unfavourable to the labourer. The habits of a people are difficult to break through when once improved by increasing wealth and the enjoyment of new comforts, and it being the tendency of our nature rather to acquire fresh luxuries than to relinquish those already possessed, it is thus that the manners and customs of a people become every day more and more civilised.

The author of some corn tracts, writing in 1765, says—"Bread made of wheat is becoming more generally the food of the labouring people," and the cause of this happy change appears to have arisen from a comparatively low price of corn. There is, indeed, no other cause to which it can be reasonably ascribed. According to Arthur Young, the average price of wheat for 100 years previous to 1700, was 38s. 2d. a quarter, and the average wages of an agricultural labourer were 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a day. For the sixty-six years ending in 1766, the price of wheat was 32s. 1d. a quarter, and the average wages of a labourer were a shilling a day. In the first instance, a man could earn but little more than a bushel of wheat for a week's work, and in the second instance, a bushel and a half. The steady fall in the price of corn appears to have operated favourably for the labourer, and to have done that which a sudden fall could not have effected. Rapid changes in price being, as I have before observed, unfavourable to the labourer, inasmuch as, in dear years, he is deprived of comforts, and, in cheap years, neither his own wants, nor the situation of the farmer will allow of the full advantage.

It may be said that the demand for agricultural labour will be injured, in the event of a repeal of the corn laws, by land being thrown out of cultivation. No intelligent agriculturist, I think, can be found at the present day, who believes that such would be the case. So long as land will pay any rent at all, it is almost needless to observe it will never go out of cultivation. A vast quantity of the waste land, enclosed during the last sixty years, was enclosed when wheat was at 40s. a quarter, and there is no reason to suppose that the same land, which is now improved, will go out of cultivation with wheat, at the same price; and, in order to make the poor or badly cultivated land of England grow more corn, a larger expenditure of labour, rather than a smaller, would be required. The Scotch farmers, who gave evidence before a

committee of the House of Commons, in 1836, all agreed in saying that they could do very well with the prices wheat had been at up to that period, viz.: from 40s. to 48s. a quarter; and they also said that there had been no distress among the farmers *paying corn rents*. Farmers paying money rents had done badly, and many of them ascribed their doing so to the circumstance of the corn laws raising expectations as to prices which were never fulfilled. A repeal of the corn laws might perhaps bring on a system of corn rents and long leases, but this would be beneficial, rather than otherwise, to the farming interest. Of the various items of expenses on a farm there are none, with but few exceptions, and these not amounting to 10s. an acre, that will not bear a strict reduction with the price of corn. Rent, tithes, poor-rates, and even taxes, would fall, and, in the receipts of a farmer, many kinds of produce would rise, such as wool, butter, and cheese, and milk, and all articles which cannot be imported. The landlord would have no cause to complain even if his rent did not bring in so much money as before. He would have his share of the produce of the soil, and in reason and in justice he can no more demand of the legislature to give his share a fictitious value than any other class in the community, and he would derive the same advantages that other classes would derive from lighter taxation, and from the daily improvements in the arts and sciences.

The same causes which led people in America to suppose that the opening of canals connecting the western with the frontier States, would destroy the value of land in the old established States, will affect England as they did the old States in America. By the increased trade that was gained by the old States, the value of land and the value of labour were advanced, and the increased consumption of agricultural produce prevented any material depreciation of price. In the same way would England, by opening her markets to the produce of the world, become the centre of civilization and wealth; and to suppose that in the increase of her wealth, the very large classes, of whom I have more particularly been speaking, will not be participants, is to refuse the experience of history, and to doubt of the principles of human nature.

ARTHUR MORSE.

*Swaffham, Norfolk, 25th, Oct., 1842.*





AGRICULTURE  
AND  
THE CORN LAW.

PRIZE ESSAY.

SHOWING THE

INJURIOUS EFFECTS OF THE CORN LAW

UPON

TENANT FARMERS AND FARM LABOURERS.

BY W. R. GREG.

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1842.

## PRIZE ESSAYS.

### AGRICULTURE AND THE CORN-LAWS.

The Council of the National Anti-Corn-Law League hereby offer the following PRIZES for the BEST PRACTICAL ESSAYS, each not to exceed sixteen pages octavo, demonstrating the Injurious Effects of the Corn-Laws on Tenant Farmers and Farm Labourers, and the Advantages which those classes would derive from its Total and Immediate Repeal:—

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THE COUNCIL HAVE AWARDED THE HIGHEST PRIZES TO EACH OF THE THREE  
ACCOMPANYING ESSAYS.

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THE  
EFFECT OF THE CORN-LAWS,  
*&c. &c.*

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THE effect of our restrictive corn-laws in hampering the commerce, depressing the manufactures, and famishing the people, of England, has been long known, and amply discussed. But that these laws are equally injurious to those classes for whose especial benefit they profess to be enacted — viz. farmers and farm-labourers — has not been so clearly made out, and is not so generally believed. The fact that any system of legislation should have the effect of diminishing the subsistence, and fettering the trade, of a great nation, ought, no doubt, to be sufficient to procure its immediate alteration. But unhappily it is not so; and in this country, as long as any numerous and powerful body of men believe, however erroneously, that their own interests are bound up in the continuance of unjust and partial enactments, so long will those enactments be maintained; or, if abolished, will be abolished only at the cost or the peril of a severe civil struggle.

The following pages, therefore, will be devoted to an examination of the real operation of our corn-laws on the welfare of farm-tenants and farm-labourers; — and if it shall appear, upon a dispassionate inquiry, that these classes have been, and are, *not gainers, but sufferers*, by these laws, we may hope that they will speedily join their commercial and manufacturing fellow-citizens in demanding their total abrogation. And first, as to their effect upon FARM-TENANTS.

I. At the very outset of the inquiry, it cannot fail to strike us as remarkable, *that the very classes, professedly to promote whose interests the principles of equal justice and commercial freedom have been trampled under foot, are, generally speaking, — in the majority of cases, and in the majority of years, — about the most depressed and unprosperous in the community.* If the system of legislative protection which has been so uniformly and unscrupulously followed were a sound one, the farmers ought to be the most thriving and fortunate of men; since for centuries back, but particularly for the last seven and twenty years, their prosperity has been professedly the especial care of Parliament; the agricultural interest has been the one to which all others have been at all times unsparingly sacrificed; and, if their measures have not answered, — if their end has not been attained, it can only have been either because their object was not attainable, or because their measures were unwisely adapted to their end.

Now, what is the actual state of the case? None can answer this question so well as the farmers themselves. Since 1815 they have had almost every thing in their favour. Their customers, the consumers of agricultural produce, have multiplied with enormous rapidity; — the wealth of these customers, and their consequent power of purchase, have increased with the extension of trade in a still more rapid ratio; — the manufacturing and engineering enterprise of the country has absorbed immense numbers of labourers, who must otherwise have remained a heavy burden on the land; — of late the remodelling of the poor-laws has relieved them from a pressing and severe embarrassment; — and taxes which bore exclusively upon the agricultural interest have been repealed to the extent of a million yearly.\* Yet what has been the result? Is it not notorious, that, during this period, farmers have been in a state of frequent and deplorable depression? During this period, have there not been *three* several corn-laws passed for their relief and encouragement alone? And, during this period, have there not been *five* parliamentary committees† sitting, to prove the existence, and inquire into the causes, of agricultural distress?

It is clear, then, that the object of our legislators has not been attained; — not, we believe, because it is unattainable, but because the measures pursued have been unfitted to their aim. We are convinced (and, if we were not, the history of our corn-legislation would go far to produce the conviction), that, in public as in private matters, selfishness, if too gross, generally defeats its own purposes; that unjust laws are always unwise ones; that the prosperity of any branch of industry can have no frailer basis, no more precarious tenure, than protective enactments; that the elevation of one class of the community cannot be permanently procured by the depression of the rest; and that an end which can only be obtained by oppression and injustice carries its own condemnation on its face.

\* The following table is taken from parliamentary returns, and the details may be found in the Companion to the Newspaper for 1836, p. 232:—

Year in which the reduction was made.	Agricultural Taxes repealed or reduced in that year.	Years since elapsed.	Total Saving to Farmers by the reductions up to 1842.
1816	£ 281,695	26	£ 7,324,070
1819	3,863	23	88,964
1822	470,103	20	9,402,160
1823	52,792	19	1,003,048
1824	6,876	18	123,763
1825	49,659	17	844,203
1832	8,710	10	87,100
1833	10,110	9	90,990
1834	102,000	8	816,000
Total	£ 985,813		£ 19,730,303

† In 1816, 1821, 1822, 1833, 1836.

The corn-laws, then, so far from having ensured success to the farmer, have not even secured him from frequent and severe distress. Thus far, all men will agree with us. Let us now inquire whether this distress may not be, in a great measure, traced to the operation of these very laws.

II. The case may be thus briefly stated. The existing corn-laws profess to secure a certain price to the farmer for his wheat. On this price the landlords — the authors of these enactments — calculate and fix their rents; and on this price the farmers make their calculations, and contract to pay those rents. *But it turns out that the corn-laws do not ensure this price.* The rents have been adjusted on a fallacious supposition: the two contracting parties, therefore, cannot both be satisfied, and the weakest goes to the wall. The landlord exacts his rent, and the farmer is ruined. We appeal to the farmers themselves, whether this is not the true process in five cases out of six, in which they have been unfortunate.

The avowed object of all the corn-laws that have ever been passed has been to fix and secure a price which would remunerate the grower; and the agriculturists generally, having a most religious conviction of the omnipotence of Parliament, have naturally concluded that the avowed object of any law would be effected by that law. The avowed purpose of the law of 1815 was to fix the price of wheat at 80s. a quarter. The language of the landed legislature was uniform upon this point. They declared that no lower price could be endured by the farmers; they told the farmers that such a price should be secured to them by law; and they arranged their rents accordingly. What has been the consequence? *In only two years\** since that period has the annual average reached that price; and those two were years of scarcity. The farmers, who had contracted to pay rents, *which only a uniform price of 80s. would enable them to pay*, were, of course, impoverished or ruined.

In 1822 the average had fallen to 43s. 3d. and the deluded farmers were clamorous in their complaints. It was then declared, that the price of 70s. a quarter must be ensured, in order to induce the farmer to keep a sufficient breadth of land under the plough; and a new corn-law was passed to procure the desired result. Again the farmers were deceived, and lulled into fancied security. Again rents were readjusted on the new assumption of a permanent average of 70s. Yet in only one year† since that period, and that one a year of scarcity, has the price reached this point. The rents, however, had to be paid. The landlord whistled, and the farmer paid the piper.

For some years subsequent to 1822, every one was dissatisfied. The consumers of corn thought they paid too much, and the growers of corn thought they received too little. Again in 1828, a deliberate attempt was made to secure prices at once high and steady; — such prices as would enable landlords to exact extreme rents, and farmers

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\* 1817, 1818.      † 1839.

to pay them. *Sixty-four shillings* was now declared to be the remunerating price; and rents were calculated and settled on this basis. Yet in only seven years out of the subsequent thirteen has this average been reached;\* and of those seven, five have been years of deficient harvests. And at least four years out of the thirteen have been years of severe agricultural distress.

In the spring of the present year, a new law was passed, in the hope of fixing 56s. as the minimum price of wheat. Yet before the harvest had been fully reaped, and before any wheat could be thrashed out, and brought to market,— viz. by September 10,— *the average weekly return had fallen to 51s. 6d.*; and by Nov. 5, it had dropped to 48s. 7d. Each successive corn-law has in fact been a new and cruel deception to the unhappy farmer; yet to each has he looked with renewed confidence for his salvation :

Cassandra's fate reversed is theirs;  
She, true, no faith could gain;  
They every passing hour deceive,  
Yet are believed again.

Our advice to him is to trust no more to such delusive protectors,—to lean no more upon such broken reeds; but, after the experience he has had, to feel convinced that whatever prospects may in future be held out to him from the same quarter will be as faithless as the past have been.

But do not thou  
The tale believe;  
They're sisters all,  
And all deceive.

The *first* evil, then, which the corn-laws have inflicted upon the farmer, has been this:— *they have induced him to contract to pay rents which — except in years of scarcity — the price of wheat will not enable him to pay.*

III. The purpose of our restrictive corn-laws is to secure high prices in this country by protecting the home grower against the competition of foreign produce. And by dint of looking always at the *intention*, and never at the *operation*, of legislative measures, a great number of our farmers have come to believe, that low prices are the effect of foreign competition, and that high prices are the consequence of that competition being shut out. Now, how stands the fact? Why, that it is impossible to point to a single year of low prices, in which there was any perceptible import of foreign produce; or to a single year of great foreign importation, which was not also a year of high prices. The years 1834, 1835, and 1836, were years of low prices, and of great distress and discontent among farmers, the average of wheat being under 45s. a quarter; yet the import of foreign wheat was only 122,175 qrs. The years 1838, 1839, and 1840, were years of high prices, and comparatively of farming pro-

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\* 1829, 30, 31, 38, 39, 40, 41.

sperity, the average of wheat being 67*s.* 2*d.*; yet in those years we imported the enormous quantity of 7,858,500 qrs. Of this we say nothing more at present than that it undoubtedly establishes the fact, *that low prices of wheat in England are not, and have never been, the effect of foreign competition.* For five months at the close of 1835, and the commencement of 1836, the price of wheat ranged under 36*s.* a quarter; at which price no foreign wheat could have been imported from any country in the world, even had the corn-trade been perfectly free, instead of being burdened as it was with a duty of 50*s.* a quarter. And in 1839, in spite of an importation of 2,681,400 qrs. prices never ranged so low as 66*s.* and averaged above 70*s.* The fact beyond all question is this,— and it should be immovably rooted in the understanding of every farmer, — *that low prices are owing to abundant harvests, and not to the admission of foreign corn; and that high prices are owing to defective harvests, and not to the exclusion of foreign corn;* — since in the former case it is never admitted, and in the latter case it is never excluded.

There is one case, and one case only, in which this rule will not altogether hold good. There is one case, and one case only, in which harvests of extreme plenty will not bring prices of extreme depression; and that is, where the prosperity of trade, and the thriving condition of the whole community, enable the poor to live better and to eat more, and the rich to add to the number of their servants and their horses; and thus to increase the consumption till it keeps pace with the increased production. There is one case, and one case only, in which scanty harvests will not ensure to the farmers prices extravagantly high; — and that is, where the distress of trade and the impoverishment of all classes have produced a diminution in the demand for food equivalent to the diminution in its supply. Had the country been flourishing, and the people been in easy circumstances during the last two years, good wheat would have reached 100*s.* instead of 80*s.* Low prices may be produced by two causes; either by excess of production, or by diminished power of purchase on the part of the consumer. High prices may be produced by two causes; either by a deficient supply, or by a brisk and vigorous demand; and it is evident that they will be most profitable to the farmer when produced by the latter cause. Under the present system, high prices are only producible by deficient crops; so that when the farmer obtains the highest price, *then he has least to sell.* If he is ever to profit equally by good harvests and by bad ones, it can only be by the community, who constitute his customers, being in a condition to buy largely in the former case, and to pay dearly in the latter. If large crops and high prices are ever to go together, it can only be when manufactures are profitable, when industry is well remunerated, when all the people are well off.

In the production of this general prosperity, then, the farmer is as deeply and directly interested, as the merchant, the tradesman, or the labourer. Yet to this general prosperity the corn-laws are notoriously the greatest obstacle. By the concurring evidence of the ablest men in every department; of practical merchants, of theoretical

economists, of celebrated statesmen; the corn-laws restrict our commerce, depress our trade, deprive our people of employment, and derange our friendly relations with foreign powers.

The *second* great mischief, then, which the corn-laws inflict upon the farmer, is that they spoil his market, by impoverishing his customers.

IV. We presume, that no doubt can exist in the mind of any one, that the *steadier* prices can be made, the better for the producer, as well as for the consumer.\* A trade in which the fluctuations are excessive, partakes of the nature of gambling; and a gambling trade is in the long run always a losing one, and generally a ruinous one. The uncertainty which pervades prices prevents any thing like safe estimates, or accurate calculations. The farmer, being wholly unable to foresee whether he shall obtain 40s. or 80s. for his wheat, knows neither what rent he can afford to pay, nor in what style he can afford to live. If the price of corn were fixed, he would know pretty exactly what he had to expect, would be able to lay out his expenses beforehand, and to calculate beforehand on a certain, though it might be a moderate, amount of profit. This degree of uniformity, we know, is not attainable; but, the nearer we can approach to it, the more desirable will become the condition of the farmer. Now nothing can be more certain than that our corn-laws have increased fluctuations of price — except that they were intended to prevent them. One of the chief pleas for the perpetual legislative peddling on this subject has been, the necessity of preventing excessive variations in the price of so important an article as food. The far-famed sliding-scale is the result of this alleged necessity; the offspring of previous variations; “the fruitful parent of a thousand more.” It was a patent invention to produce uniformity of price. Yet the annexed table† will show

\* “Fluctuations of price, whether they arise from alteration in the value of money, or from changes in the corn-laws, cannot fail to produce evils in every branch of rural economy, which, independently of these disturbing causes, must ever remain exposed to grievous vicissitudes from the uncertainty of seasons. These artificial fluctuations, however, only aggravate the natural evil: they render the income of the landlord precarious, the *fixed rent of the farmer a hazardous speculation*, and the wages of the labourer an uncertain remuneration. . . . . *Steadiness of price*, which is conducive to settled habits, and forms the basis of all fixed engagements, is the primary object never again to be overlooked.”

Report of Committee of House of Commons, 1833.

†

Year in which the Corn Law was passed.	Lowest Price of Wheat under this Law.	Highest Price under this Law.	Fluctuation under this Law. Per cent.
	s. d.	s. d.	
1670	35 6	64 0	80
1689	23 0	81 0	252
1773	35 7	59 0	67
1791	41 0	156 0	280
1804	49 6	155 0	213
1815	38 1	112 7	196
1822	40 0	69 0	72
1828	36 0	79 0	119

how completely this, as well as all previous enactments, has failed in effecting even an approximation to its object. And Mr. Tooke, Sir Robert Peel's favourite authority, declares (and, we doubt not, with perfect correctness), that, under the sliding-scale, prices *must* fluctuate at least from 36*s.* to 73*s.* a quarter, or more than 100 per cent.\*

Here, then, we have three remarkable facts. *First*, we have a parliamentary declaration, that steadiness of price is the primary object; which must never be lost sight of, and which is perfectly essential to the welfare of the landlord, the farmer, and the labourer. *Secondly*, we have a law passed for the purpose of procuring this steadiness, which nevertheless has not prevented the most excessive fluctuations. And, *thirdly*, we have it shown on the first authority, that this very law does, and *must*, aggravate these very fluctuations.† Surely a law passed with a definite object, and producing the exact opposite of that object, needs no further condemnation.

Moreover, it is perfectly evident that steadiness of price is at least as important to the consumer as to the grower of corn. The grower, if he be a man of capital, may to a certain extent set a high-priced year against a low-priced year, and so make a decent average. But the poor bread-eater cannot do this. He cannot lay in a stock of flour at 36*s.* and keep it by him to consume when the price is 73*s.* He eats what he wants in the low-priced year; and when the high-priced year comes, he lives upon something else, or eats only half the quantity. Had the price been stationary at 50*s.* he would have been to the farmer a regular customer for a regular quantity. But, as it is, he is a customer at 36*s.* and he ceases to be a customer at 73*s.* This, therefore, brings us to the important principle, — *that the country could afford to pay the farmer a better average price, if prices were steady, than if they are fluctuating.* What we complain of is, not so much that wheat should average 50*s.* a quarter as that it should ever reach 80*s.*

The *third* great mischief, then, which the corn-law inflicts upon the farmer is this: — by aggravating fluctuations, it upsets all his calculations; and *prevents the country from paying him as high an average, as with steady prices it would be able to afford.*‡

\* Tooke on Prices, III. pp. 35, 38.

† Under a fixed duty or a free trade, corn would come in just as it was wanted; the supply would meet the demand, and be proportionate to it, both in time and in amount. Under the sliding scale the price is rapidly and inordinately raised by the artificial withholding of the supply, till the lowest duty is attained, when it is as rapidly depressed by the sudden liberation of the whole quantity in bond.

‡ We apprehend that the farmers are very much deceived as to the actual average prices of wheat. The *apparent* average from 1829—1841, as taken from the weekly returns, was 58*s.* 9*d.* a quarter; but, as by far the greater quantities are always sold in the low-priced years, and generally in the lowest-priced weeks of those years, the real average paid to the farmers will be far lower; probably about 53*s.* On examining the quantity of wheat sold in the 150 towns from which returns were made to the corn inspectors, we find that in the *three dear years* 1829, 30, 31, when the average price was 65*s.* 7*d.* the quantity sold reached only 8,515,000 qrs. which in the *three cheap years* 1834, 5, 6, when the price had fallen to 46*s.* 2*d.* the quantity sold reached 11,286,000 qrs. And in 1839,

V. From what has been already said, it appears pretty clear that restrictive corn-laws are decidedly injurious to the farmer. It remains to be seen, that, of all possible modifications of such laws, that which is known as the *sliding-scale* is the most fraught with mischief and delusion. It is, indeed, the very quintessence of evil. It is ruinous alike to the merchant, to the manufacturer, to the consumer; to the foreign producer, to the English farmer. If our legislators had sat down in all diligence and good faith to contrive a law which should be productive of a minimum of benefit to any class, and a maximum of injury to all, they could not possibly have devised one more exquisitely adapted to its end. Such are the singular errors into which even able men will ever be liable to fall, when they endeavour to counteract the operation of natural causes; when they commit themselves to an impotent struggle with the laws which govern the moral and material world.

Had the sliding-scale been the exact converse of what it is;—had it been made to slide in the opposite direction, the duty falling with the fall in price, and advancing with its advance;—had the duty been nominal at 40*s.* and prohibitory at 73*s.*; then, though in many respects more burdensome to the community, it would have afforded to the farmer a less delusive protection than the present law; as he would in that case have reaped the full benefit of high-priced years. In one case he would have been secured against foreign competition by low prices; in the other case, by the high duty. *His protection would have been proportioned to his danger.* — “What,” says Dr. Johnson, “is a patron? Is he not one who will see a man struggling in the waves, without stretching out a hand to his assistance, but who, as soon as he has reached the shore in safety, *encumbers* him with help?” Just such a patron has the sliding-scale proved to the deceived and miserable farmer. When wheat is at 40*s.* a quarter, and no foreign corn can in consequence possibly come in, it mocks him with a needless protection of 50 per cent. But when prices are rising, and prospects brightening around him, and he—unhappy dupe! is solacing his tantalized and thirsty soul with a golden vision of 73*s.* a quarter for his coming crop, the protection is suddenly withdrawn, and the deluge of foreign competition is let in upon him. Yet this is the law which farmers, in their darkness, have been strenuously struggling to save.

The sliding-scale has yet a further operation which presses with

1840, 41, when the price had again risen to 67*s.* 1*d.* the quantity sold, notwithstanding a great increase of population, had fallen off to 10,938,000 qrs. In 1838, at 64*s.* 7*d.* 4,064,000 qrs. were sold. In 1839, *the price had risen to 70s. 8d. and only 3,174,000 qrs. were sold.* The same peculiarity appears if we compare different parts of the same year. In the two highest-priced months of 1835, viz. July and August, at the price of 40*s.* 9*d.* only 510,513 qrs. were sold. But in November and December, when prices had receded to 35*s.* 5*d.* 704,100 qrs. were sold.

Mr. Tooke has a similar remark (Prices, III. p. 40). Between 1831 and 1839, the *apparent* average was 56*s.* : the *real* average obtained by the farmer, he estimates at 50*s.*

peculiar severity upon the English agriculturist. *It depresses prices just when his stock of corn is largest, and when he is most anxious to realise; — and raises them when he has none to sell.*\* This is not an accidental operation: it is inherent in the nature of a sliding-scale. In five years out of six, prices are highest just before the harvest, because then the stock of wheat in the country is the lowest; and they fall immediately after the harvest, from the opposite reason. We give in a note a table illustrative of this fact from 1829 to 1841,† showing that the average price has invariably fallen about harvest-time nearly eight per cent, or from 60s. 4d. to 55s. 9d. a quarter. In the present year, this result has been still more remarkably brought out. The harvest was unusually early, and the stocks of farmers more than usually exhausted. On July 9th the weekly average was 65s. 8d.; on September 10th, when the harvest was generally got in, and when farmers in the south were ready to bring their wheat to market, it had dropped to 51s. 6d. — a fall of nearly 22 per cent!

Now that this fall is to be attributed chiefly, though not altogether, to the operation of the sliding-scale, is evident from the fact that it is equally observable in defective as in abundant years. *But* for the sliding-scale, a rise in price would naturally be the immediate consequence of a deficient harvest. But the duty being always lowest when the price is highest, and prices having, as we have just seen, generally reached their maximum in August or September, the whole

\* “The sudden admission of so large a quantity of foreign wheat in September 1838 [1,513,113 qrs. in one week] had the effect, notwithstanding the ascertained deficiency of our own growth, of depressing markets; so that the average price, which on the 24th of August had been 77s. declined within the four following weeks to 61s. 10d.—so that whereas the previous rise to 77s. was for the benefit only of the wealthier farmers who had been able to hold their stocks of the crop of 1837 to the last, the subsequent fall was to the detriment of the numerous class of small farmers, who, having by that time got their crops in everywhere south of the Humber, were threshing out, and as usual bringing the earliest supplies to market.”—Tooke, III. p. 30.

Year.	Average Price of July & Aug.		Average Price of Sept. & Oct.	
	s.	d.	s.	d.
1829	64	5½	59	0
1830	69	8	60	7½
1831	62	5	59	8
1832	60	10	53	4
1833	53	3	51	5
1834	46	10	41	3
1835	40	8	36	5
1836	48	0	46	5
1837	56	4	53	1
1838	71	0	65	2
1839	70	3	68	11
1840	71	2	64	5
1841	69	5	65	5

of the foreign corn in bond is certain to be liberated at that time, and is thrown upon the market so as to depress the price, just as the farmer (who, being rarely a man of capital, cannot wait till the reaction of the following summer, but must realise at once) is preparing to thrash out his wheat. The annexed table\* will show, that, in every year of considerable foreign importation since the enactment of the sliding-scale (except 1831 and 1839), the chief portion has been poured into the market immediately before the harvest, and the lowest point of duty has almost always been reached in August or September.

The experience of the last fourteen years, then, and more especially of the present year, must, we think, have convinced the farmer, *that the inevitable operation of the sliding-scale is to expose him to the overwhelming competition of a sudden influx of foreign corn, just at the period when he has most to sell, when he is most anxious to sell, and when consequently such competition will be most severely felt.* Is this the effect which he looked for from it? Is it an effect which he is desirous to perpetuate? Does it not convince him, that the sliding-scale, to which he trusted for protection, has been, in truth, his greatest enemy?

But it has a still further, and still more hostile operation on the poor farmer. *It exposes him to the depressing competition of a larger quantity of foreign corn than is actually wanted, or would otherwise come in.* When it becomes evident that our harvests are likely to be deficient, orders are sent abroad for large quantities of wheat, which continue to come in long after the deficiency is supplied, and when prices are receding to a moderate level. Under ordinary circumstances, this extra quantity would not be called for till it was actually wanted. But as, under the sliding-scale, the duty is rapidly

* Year.	Quarters of wheat and wheat flour entered for home consumption in July, Aug. & Sept.	Quarters of wheat and wheat flour entered in the other nine months.
1829	681,000	761,000
1830	1,435,700	294,000
1831	59,700	1,447,000
1832	278,300	98,400
1833	42,000	42,000
1834	23,000	41,900
1835	10,000	18,500
1836	12,200	17,900
1837	196,900	46,100
1838	1,538,500	409,500
1839	840,800	1,870,900
1840	1,587,600	813,500
1841	2,343,200	304,600
1842†	2,530,000	320,000
Total	13,628,900	6,485,300

† Up to September 5.

rising, and will soon become prohibitory, the importer is obliged to enter it at once, and bring it upon a market where it is not required, and which, consequently, it must tend unduly to depress.

Moreover, this happy invention, the sliding-scale, not only exposes the farmer to the risk of more foreign wheat coming in than is required, *but of much coming in when none at all is required.* The corn merchant is obliged to act beforehand in an estimate of probabilities. If he conceives that the harvests are likely to be deficient, he does not wait, as under a free trade he would be able to do, till the deficiency is ascertained, — but he sends out his orders for foreign corn to come in at the period when the duty is usually the lowest, and the price the highest, viz. just before the harvest. But it sometimes chances, that he is mistaken in his anticipations,— that the crop turns out a fair average, and that importations are not needed. But his orders are executed, and the foreign corn comes pouring in. He dares not wait for the chance of the duty rising to a point which shall make his speculation overwhelmingly ruinous: he must liberate his corn on the best terms he can, and bring it to market as early as he can, whether wanted or not, before the full effect of the harvest in depressing prices has had time to operate.

This, then, is the *fourth count* of the farmer's indictment against the corn-laws:—that *they introduce foreign corn at the worst possible moment;* — that *they introduce more than is wanted;* — and that *they introduce it when not wanted at all.*

VI. Thus far we have considered the effect of the corn-laws on the interests of the farmer, considered merely in his capacity of a producer;\* and as a producer, we have shown them to be in every way injurious to him. Either they raise the average price of corn, or they do not. If they do not, it is clear that neither he nor his landlord has any interest in maintaining them. If they do, we have seen that his landlord reaps the benefit, because he calculates his rent accordingly. *But the farmer is a consumer as well as a producer, — an eater of corn as well as a grower of it; and, in this capacity, low prices, and not high prices, are desirable for him.* Nay, more; he is a consumer to a greater extent than any other individual in the community; for to his own consumption must be added the far larger quantity required for seed-corn, and for feeding his cattle. High prices, therefore, not only add materially to his household expenses; they increase his cost of production, and thereby diminish the profits of his occupation. This point is too clear to need any further elucidation. As consumers, we repeat, farmers are more interested in low prices than any other class of men in the country.

But farmers are consumers in another point of view. They have

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\* It should be borne in mind, that the farmer is a producer of other articles besides corn: he is a producer of meat, of milk, of cheese, of butter; and in proportion as the price of corn rises, must the people's consumption of the other articles be reduced.—But our limits prevent us from dwelling upon this point at present.

to feed the poor. In the agricultural districts they are the chief rate-payers. Now, the corn-laws augment the poor-rates by a double operation. They increase the number of paupers, by depressing trade and manufactures;—and they add to the cost of their maintenance, by raising the price of corn. The latter effect may be judged of from the annexed table,\* from which it appears, that, in five agricultural counties alone, the difference of pauper expenditure between a cheap year, and a dear one, was £78,131 under the old system, and £71,913 under the amended law. The former effect, though equally certain, it is not so easy to show by tabular statements; but it is notorious that the manufacturing districts, when prosperous, draft off, and provide employment for many thousands of labourers from the agricultural counties, who would otherwise have to be supported by the rates of their native parishes;† — that, if these labourers had

\* SUMS EXPENDED FOR THE RELIEF OF THE POOR,

COUNTIES.	Under the Old Poor Law.		Under the New Poor Law.	
	1829.	1833.	1837.	1839.
Bucks . . . . .	£135,239	£124,200	£61,634	£72,367
Bedford . . . . .	84,513	77,819	37,447	39,889
Essex . . . . .	282,132	239,946	149,356	165,340
Devon . . . . .	222,381	210,825	169,449	194,361
Dorset . . . . .	90,949	84,293	63,531	81,373
Total . . . . .	£815,214	£737,083	£481,417	£553,330
Average Price of Wheat	66s. 3d.	52s. 11d.	55s. 10d.	70s. 8d.

+ “ We do not know the exact amount of migration from rural to industrial districts, but we know that it must have been immense; for while the *natural* increase of the population (i.e. the excess of births above deaths), during the last ten years, has been much the greatest in the former, the *actual* increase has been much the greatest in the latter. A careful examination of the table given below, coupled with the annual increase of the population, will leave little room for doubt, that since 1836, the manufacturing districts have found employment and subsistence for at least 400,000 additional persons.

AGRICULTURAL COUNTIES.	Increase per cent. in the Population from 1831 to 1841.	MANUFACTURING COUNTIES.		Increase per cent. of Population, from 1831 to 1841.	Births to Popula- tion in 1830.	Deaths to Popula- tion in 1840.	Births to Popula- tion in 1830.	Deaths to Popula- tion in 1840.
		Births to Popula- tion in 1830.	Deaths to Popula- tion in 1840.					
Hereford . . .	2.9	one in 37	one in 63	Lancaster . . .	25	one in 38	one in 32	
Cumberland . .	4.8	36	51	Durham . . .	27	35	43	
Norfolk . . .	5.7	33	51	Warwick . . .	19	36	45	
Oxford . . .	6.1	32	50	Stafford . . .	24	32	51	
Suffolk . . .	6.3	37	52	York, W. R. .	18	38	43	
Buckingham . .	6.4	36	52	Chester . . .	19	43	42	
Average . . .	5.4	35	52	Average . . .	22	37	43	

N.B. The year 1830 is the last for which we have any calculation of the births.”

“ *Not Overproduction*,” &c. by W. R. Greg, p. 16.

remained, or were now to be returned upon their native parishes, the consequent augmentation of the rates would bring ruin upon every farmer in the country;—that this re-emigration will assuredly take place, if the present depression of trade and manufactures should unhappily continue;—and that continue it assuredly will, unless those restrictive corn-laws, which press so heavily both upon our foreign commerce and our home demand, shall be speedily removed. *The repeal of the corn-laws is therefore necessary to save the farmer himself from ultimate and entire ruin.*

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Let us now consider the effect of the corn-laws upon the FARM LABOURER. The effect may be stated in two words:—*They raise the price of the commodity he has to buy, and lower the price of the commodity he has to sell.* They enhance the cost of provisions, and depress the wages of labour.

I. Like all consumers, the agricultural labourer has a paramount interest in cheap food. It is calculated, that in ordinary years one-half his whole expenditure is laid out in bread. In years of scarcity, however, he must expend much more than this, and yet obtain much less. When the price of corn is low, he has therefore a far greater command of the comforts and necessities of life than when it is high. This requires no elaborate demonstration. The labourer knows it to be the case. A very slight consideration will show that it must be so. Uniform experience has shown that it is so.

Some persons, however, have ventured to assert, that this operation is counteracted by an alteration in the rate of wages;—that the wages of the labourer rise and fall according to the price of corn, and in proportion to the price of corn;—and that his command of the necessities of life in consequence always remains the same. The falsehood of this statement is obvious from the following consideration: Years of high price are always years of scanty crops, and are so merely because they are years of scanty crops. To affirm, therefore, that when corn is dear, the labourer is enabled to purchase as much bread as when corn is cheap, is to affirm that he can obtain a larger proportion of a scanty crop than he can of an abundant one;—which is manifestly both an untruth and an absurdity. In years of scarcity, it is obvious that some classes must consume much less bread than they do in years of plenty; because there is much less to be consumed. *What are these classes?* Are they the rich, or are they the poor? Are they the higher and middle classes, or are they the labouring classes? We know that the former rarely alter at all, and never alter materially, their rate of consumption;—we know, therefore, that the consumption of the latter must fall off in a more than proportionate degree. When the rich are compelled to retrench, they retrench in luxuries, not in food. When the pressure of scarcity compels the poor man to retrench, he has no luxuries to lay down, and his retrenchment therefore falls almost immediately upon his daily bread.

It is no doubt the case in many parts of England, perhaps in all, that the wages of the farm labourer do vary to a certain extent in

years of great diversity ; that is to say, that, when the price of provisions is so high as to make it impossible for the labourer to maintain his family on his ordinary wages, those wages are advanced, though in an inadequate degree ; otherwise he would be obliged to seek assistance from the parish ; — and the farmer knows, that, whether he pays the advance in the form of wages or of poor-rates, is a matter of comparatively little moment. In like manner, when the price of provisions is unusually low, wages are commonly reduced, because the general redundancy of labour in the agricultural districts enables the farmer, in the great majority of instances, to procure hands at the lowest rate of earnings that will afford a bare subsistence. But is there a single agricultural labourer in the country who will affirm that his wages go as far when wheat is at 60*s.* as when it stands at 40*s.*? We believe not.

In 1835 and 1836, the prices of all kinds of farming produce were unusually low ; and, in the spring of the latter year, a committee of the House of Commons was, of course, appointed to inquire into the causes of the existing agricultural distress. Great numbers of witnesses from all parts of the country were examined, the chief portion of whom were farmers. Of thirty-eight of these, who were particularly questioned as to the comparative condition of the labourer at that time, in order to ascertain whether or not he had benefited, as he ought to have done, by the low price of food, only eight spoke doubtfully, or negatively ; — the remaining thirty declared with one consent, that, although wages were unquestionably low, the labourers were in general fully employed, *and had never within their memory been in so comfortable a condition, or able to procure so large a supply of the decencies and necessaries of life.*\* A similar committee, which had sat in 1833, at which period also prices were moderate, and produce was abundant, reported to the same effect in the following words : —

“ Amidst the numerous difficulties to which agriculture in this country is exposed, and amidst the distress which unhappily exists, it is a consolation to find that the general condition of the agricultural labourer in full employment *is better now than at any former period ; his money wages giving him a greater command over the necessities and conveniences of life.*”

In 1836, when the committee made their report, wheat was under 40*s.* a quarter. Within three years of this period, the price had reached 73*s.* or nearly double. Was the labourer as comfortably off in 1839† as he had been in 1836 ? Could he procure any thing like

\* First, Second, and Third Reports of the Committee of 1836, especially p. 353.

† “ The state of prices of provisions, and of the rate of wages in the last two years (1838, 1839) strikingly confirms the deductions from previous experience of the little tendency which exists in wages to follow a fall or rise in the prices of provisions, except at long intervals, and then only in a degree far short of such fall or rise. .... In a few instances the wages of agricultural labourers have been raised, but in a very trifling proportion to the rise of necessaries ; and in cases where an advance has been granted, it has rather been from motives of fear or humanity on the part of the employer, than as a legitimate consequence of an improved demand relatively to the supply of labour.”

the same amount of wholesome and nutritious food? Could he expend as much in clothing? Had his wages advanced in any thing like a corresponding proportion? *If they had*, why was the home trade so bad? Why were the poor-rates so much heavier in the latter year?\* Why had the consumption of exciseable articles so greatly fallen off?† And why had the duties on malt, tea, and sugar, been so singularly diminished?‡ *If they had not*, what becomes of the assertion that the high price of wheat is no injury to the farm labourer?

II. But the wages of the labourer are not only *not raised* in proportion to the price of corn; — it admits of certain demonstration, that in the long run they are actually lowered by the operation of the corn-laws. That these laws have the effect of curtailing *both the foreign and the home demand*, for the products of manufacturing industry, we shall take for granted, because it has been so repeatedly proved, and is now so generally acknowledged, that all reasoning upon the subject here would be superfluous. In proportion as they have this effect, they limit the extension of manufactures, and the employment of the people therein. They limit the demand for labour, and consequently lessen its remuneration.

The number of individuals occupied in the cultivation of the soil has not increased, and will not increase, with the extension of that cultivation. On the contrary, it has diminished, and we have no doubt will continue to diminish, unless some such change should take place in our system of agriculture as shall approach to garden cultivation. In the ten years ending with 1830, we know that tillage had been much extended, and that large additional quantities of land had been brought under the plough. The number of enclosure bills passed during that period was 205; yet, during that period, the number of families engaged in agriculture had decreased from 978,500 to 961,000; while 470,000 families had been

\* In spite of the increased economy brought about by the progressive introduction of the amended law, the total amount expended for the relief of the poor had risen from £3,800,000 in 1836, to £4,310,000 in 1839. And the *increase had taken place in every county in England*, except Lincoln, Shropshire, and Southampton.

† The excise duties collected in 1836 were £16,587,992; and in 1839 they had fallen off to £15,488,000, instead of having risen to £17,088,000, which they would have done had they kept pace with the population.

DUTIES ON	1836.	1839.	Would have been in 1839 had it kept pace with the Population.	
Malt . . .	£ 5,776,094	£ 4,853,992		
Tea . . .	4,255,949	3,222,571		
Sugar . . .	4,348,609	4,224,595		
Total . . .	£14,380,652	£12,301,169	£14,812,500	Diminution, two mil- lions and a half.

added to our total population. The returns of the last ten years, from 1831 to 1841, have not yet been published ; but we will venture to predict, that, when published, they will show a similar result. From this we draw two conclusions, which admit of no denial :—*first*, that the economy of labour by the introduction of improved modes of culture more than counterbalances the demand for labour by fresh land being brought under the plough ;—and consequently, *in the second place*, that it is not to any advance in agriculture that our increasing population must look for employment and support.

But the population of Great Britain multiplies at the rate of 200,000 annually, of whom three-fourths, or 150,000, must be estimated to belong to the working classes, who must either starve or live upon charity, or subsist by the labour of their hands. Employment must be found for 150,000 additional pair of hands every year. As long as trade and commerce prosper, they will find this employment in manufacturing pursuits, and the subsidiary crafts ;—when trade and commerce are depressed and blighted, they will be thrown back upon the land, either to live in idleness upon its fruits, *or by competition to depress the wages of the farming labourer*. Hitherto the course of events has happily followed the former alternative ; but the time for the latter is fast approaching, nay has actually commenced ; and, unless the corn-laws are speedily removed, it can no longer be arrested. Now, we have seen that no additional hands are required for the cultivation of the soil ;—in fact, their numbers are already redundant. What, then, must be the effect of the annual influx of 150,000 additional labourers into a market already overstocked ? What but *ruinously to depress the wages of labour,—the price of the only commodity the poor man has to sell?* The conclusion is as certain as any in arithmetic, that *such a check to the advance of manufactures as the corn-laws are fast bringing about, will infallibly reduce the earnings of the agricultural labourer to the very lowest point at which even the most uncomfortable life can be sustained,—far below even their present pitiful amount.*

As to what the corn-law *has* effected, some controversy may arise. As to what it *has not* effected, there can be no controversy whatever ; since it must be evident to the dullest understanding, that what has not been effected at all cannot have been effected by the corn-law. The corn-laws, then, have *not* made farmers prosperous, — have *not* made prices steady, — have *not* raised nor maintained the wages of the labourer. Yet these were the *avowed* objects for which they were enacted. The object they *have* effected was one which was *not* avowed, viz. to raise the rents of the landlords :—and this they have effected at the expense of undermining that national prosperity by the continuance of which alone can high rents be permanently secured. With the blind unthrift which is the usual companion and corrective of rapacity, they have killed the goose which laid their golden eggs.

Caton, Lancaster, 30th Oct. 1842.

W. R. GREG.